

Orange County Corrections Addresses Needs of Women Offenders

by **Georgette Thornton,**
Orange County Corrections,
Orlando, Florida.

As more women are arrested and incarcerated in our correctional facilities each year, the gap in programming that meets their specific needs becomes more apparent. The rise in arrests and convictions of women is staggering, and few agencies are able to accommodate these women appropriately through their existing facilities and resources.

Consequently, the female offender must often take a back seat in the system and be content with the "left-overs" handed down from men's facilities. Fortunately, however, correctional agencies are finally seeing the need to provide parity to women offenders. Along with a new correctional mentality, the legal issue of equality for incarcerated women is forcing many changes.

In Orange County, Florida, much is being done to standardize the supervision and program opportunities for offenders of both sexes. The mission of the Orange County Corrections Division in Orlando, Florida, is to take responsibility for the condition in which inmates are released back into the community.

This is especially critical in relation to women offenders and is accomplished through the Inmate Management System (IMS). (For an article on the IMS, see "A Structural Approach to Inmate Management," *Large Jail Network Bulletin*, Vol. 1, no. 1, April 1989). The IMS responds to and encourages inmates' positive behavioral growth by providing habilitative program opportunities. Its basis is that by displaying positive, acceptable behavior and adhering to system rules, inmates may advance to levels of housing that provide greater amenities and program opportunities.

Implementation and regulation of the IMS are overseen by the Offender Services Department. The department has also established a "continuum of care" component that identifies an inmate's psychological and sociological needs as well as the means to address them while he or she is under our custody and control.

The continuum begins at booking, when a needs assessment is performed. From then on, the inmate is guided toward the facilities, programs, and services that address his or her needs. This process continues throughout all phases of corrections, including traditional housing, community based corrections, and community control. Inmates who show appropriate behavior can work their way into a

less restrictive facility and eventually a community correctional facility or community supervision.

Orange County's women's facility supports the IMS and continuum of care by taking a proactive approach to developing educational and life skills programs that promote, foster, and enhance appropriate behavior. The needs of women offenders are many and varied. In terms of their average characteristics, women offenders are likely to be:

- Young-between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four.
- Unmarried.
- Responsible for dependent children.
- Unemployed at the time of their arrest.
- Undereducated and lacking in job skills.
- Very low in self-esteem.

These sociological factors present a unique challenge to the development of programs for female offenders. To effectively respond to the particular needs of female offenders, Orange County found it necessary to focus on specific areas and design specific programs to get to the root of an individual's behavior, in order to help women change their destructive behaviors.

Program Objectives

Three main objectives are the basis for the design of rehabilitative programs for female offenders in Orange County:

- Programs need to delve deeper into the psychological factors of female offenders and women in general to address the societal problems and circumstances that women regularly encounter.
- Educational programs must be enhanced to provide the basic literacy and academic skills that will prepare female offenders to assume an independent lifestyle and successfully enter a competitive job market.
- Emphasis must be placed on developing an equal number of educational and vocational programs for women as are offered to men, and they must address the specific needs of female offenders.

Based on these objectives, Orange County is exploring several areas of programming. The two most important areas being addressed are literacy/vocational education and life skills training. To address the basics, Orange County provides Adult Basic Education, G.E.D., and literacy instruction. Vocational classes in keyboard familiarization and basic computer use are also provided.

To further support our programmatic philosophy, we offer extensive classes in life skills competencies.

Life skills programming is being provided through a series of two-hour Saturday seminars. These seminars have so far addressed personal motivation, self-esteem building, career planning, and making choices.

Additionally, two comprehensive programs provide life skills learning in a group setting through specialized housing. The first is the NURTURE unit, managed by the Orange County Jail Ministry. The teachings of this program are religiously based, but they address the sociological problems faced by women in and out of jail.

The second is the Corrections Chemical Dependency Program, which is over-

seen by facilitators from the Center for Drug Free Living. The program is based on a

twelve-step approach and attempts to educate women about the reasons behind their drug addictions and to suggest alternate behaviors.

Together, these programs provide a basis for the more specialized programs that address specific circumstances that may have contributed to the incarceration of our female offenders.

HELP Program

One of the most unique programs that is offered to address the specific needs of female offenders is the

HELP (Health Education for Life Planning) Program. HELP is a re-entry program for pregnant women with a history of substance abuse. It is designed to help incarcerated women who are nearing their release to prepare for their adjustment back into the community. The program has been designed through a cooperative effort between the Orange County Corrections Division and Snowbabies, Inc., in Orlando.

Snowbabies, Inc., was founded in 1987 by Tammy Herman, a reformed substance abuser, and Dr. Gregor Alexander, chief of the neonatal intensive care unit at the Arnold Palmer Hospital for Women and Children. Its intent is to address

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the problems of drug-addicted mothers and their children. After the concept for Snowbabies was firmly grounded, Tammy contacted the corrections division to offer her services to the women who needed it most: those who are pregnant and in jail due to their addictive behaviors.

The HELP program is offered to selected inmates and includes both instruction in the institution and support on the outside. The instruction is designed as a five-week program based on two, two-hour

sessions per week. The instruction is presented in the following format:

- Sessions 1-5 address the psychological and sociological aspects of addiction, focusing on the sharing of experiences and the understanding of past behaviors.
- Sessions 6-7 educate the women on the physiological aspects of pregnancy and the effects of substance abuse on the developing fetus and in childbirth.
- Sessions 8-10 provide guidance and support for community re-entry through planning, personal improvement, and goal setting.

The program is conducted by Ms. Herman with the assistance of volunteer professionals from the community. To date, women have completed four sessions of the HELP program. Their immediate reactions have been very positive.

To complement the HELP program, and with the help of the chaplain from Orange County Jail Ministries, Tammy has set up shepherding homes that care for newborn infants

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whose mothers are incarcerated. The personality of the birth mother is matched to the shepherding mother so that a cooperative relationship be-

tween the two can be formed. The shepherding mother cares for the child during the mother's incarceration and helps accustom her to the care of her child upon her release.

A third part of this comprehensive program is HELP House, now under renovation on a quiet side street in downtown Orlando. HELP House provides an appropriate environment for reuniting a mother and child upon the mother's release from jail. Though the mother is technically outside the control of the correctional system, she is guided by strict rules developed and enforced by Snowbabies, Inc. She is required to seek employment, assist with household chores, tend to her own and her baby's personal needs, and continue to attend group and individual counseling sessions that address her addictive habits. HELP House is a haven for released women and offers them an alternative to returning to the destructive environments that put them in jail in the first place.

Breaking Barriers, a follow-up to the HELP Program, is designed to raise the self-esteem of women who have spent time in the correctional system.

It is provided by the Pacific Institute, based in Seattle, Washington. Breaking Barriers helps inmates look at their destructive behaviors and provides ways to overcome negative thoughts and substitute these with positive thinking and goal-setting.

Programs Change Behaviors

The focus of all Orange County's programming for women is to provide each the opportunity to change her life by changing her behaviors, whether by learning to read, getting a G.E.D., participating in substance abuse counseling, or raising self-esteem. Training provided to correctional officers covers behaviors specific to women offenders and the supervision techniques needed to control these behaviors. With this knowledge and the use of interpersonal communication skills, correctional officers find it easier to manage the women under their supervision. Use of direct supervision also helps provide an environment that encourages good behavior.

Over the last two hundred years, locking offenders up and allowing them to fend for themselves has done nothing to lower recidivism rates. Instead, the women offenders in our custody need role models to follow. They need guidance and education about the realities of life and ways they can achieve an independent lifestyle. Through programs such as HELP and Breaking Barriers, we in Orange County feel we are providing significant guidance on women's road to recovering and becoming respectable members of the community.

For additional Information, contact Georgette Thornton, Orange County Corrections, Orlando, Florida, (407) 648-3500. ■